

**A PRESUMED KILLER WHALE (*ORCINUS ORCA*) ATTACK ON HUMPBAC WHALES (*MEGAPTERA NOVAEANGLIAE*) AT POINT LOOKOUT, QUEENSLAND.** *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum* 47(2): 436. 2001.- Reports of fatal attacks by killer whales on humpback whales are uncommon (Flórez-González et al., 1994). This report describes a presumed killer whale attack with possible humpback whale calf mortality.

On 10 October 1999 during a survey of the southern humpback whale migration past Point Lookout (27°26'S, 153°33'E) on North Stradbroke Island (Fig. 1A) killer whales were first noted at 1128h in close association with a large (~5) disjointed group of humpback whales 300m south of Flat Rock (Fig. 1B). The position was at the extreme northern limit of visibility of the east facing 67m high shore position. Accordingly, it is not known when the encounter began. The events are best described as a mêlée with both species rapidly circling and changing course while blowing strongly similar to the ship-based observations of Flórez-González et al. (1994).

Humpback whale calves were not identified at that distance (~3km) but mother/calf pairs were identified at 0640 and 0657h on that day as well as on the preceding and following days. Calves were usually identified as they passed east of the observation position.

At 1228h the killer whales (~10) were concentrated in relatively deep water (Fig. 1A) ~800m east-northeast of Boat Rock (Fig. 1B) and appeared to be diving repeatedly and did not cease this activity until they dispersed at 1415h.

The original humpback whale group passed inshore of Boat Rock at 1228h, rounded its eastern aspect and returned

northwards. Three adults of the group then returned and remained in the vicinity of Boat Rock while two went south. On occasions, the three moved towards the killer whales and circled in the area until 1408h before passing out of sight in a northwest direction.

Such events have not been witnessed on any other of 931 days from 1978-99 when watching humpback whales from the same shore position. Most humpback whale calves seen from Point Lookout are paired with their mothers and are separate from other groups. Killer whales are known to attack baleen whale calves in low latitudes (Flórez-González et al., 1994; Corkeron & Connor, 1999). Although calves were not identified in the events described above, it is possible that a calf was already wounded before 1128h. The actions of the three adult whales may have been an attempt to 'assist' a dying calf, which was subsequently devoured in the area north of Boat Rock.

#### Literature Cited

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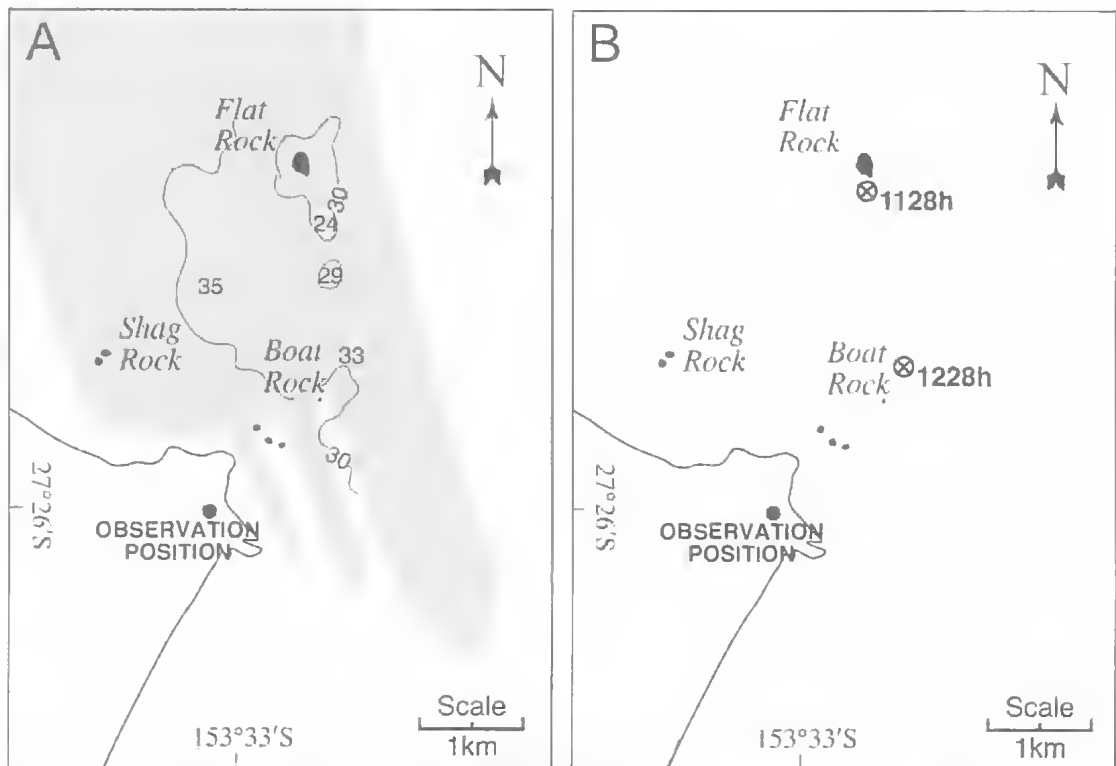


FIG. 1. Map of Point Lookout; A, course taken by southbound humpback whales (Paterson, 1991), relevant isobaths in metres; B, positions of initial and final stages of the killer whale attack observed on 10 Oct 1999.